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CUMNOR PLACE.

BERKS.

Taken down AD 1810

AN
HISTORICAL
ACCOUNT OF CUMNER;

With some Particulars of the Traditions respecting
THE DEATH OF THE COUNTESS OF LEICESTER;

Also
AN EXTRACT
FROM

ASHMOLE's ANTIQUITIES OF BERKSHIRE,

Relative to that Transaction and Illustrative of

The Romance of Kenilworth.

To which is added

AN APPENDIX,

Containing

THE ORIGINAL BALLAD OF CUMNER HALL,
AND OTHER INTERESTING MATTER.

BY
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SECOND EDITION



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INTRODUCTION.

THE deep interest so deservedly felt, and so openly evinced for every production which emanates from the highly-gifted “Author of Waverly,” reflects a corresponding interest on every subject connected with a Tale on which the finest feelings of the mind are unavoidably concentrated. These sentiments, so universally excited by the perusal of this Author’s former Tales, can assuredly not have

been lessened by his last production of “Kenilworth,” which, perhaps, from the circumstances of the case, from the melancholy story of a very young and lovely woman contending with villainy and treachery, and struggling with the most trying hardships and privations, appeals more closely to the human heart, and is more calculated to excite the warm emotions of pity, than any of his earlier works. It is on the prevalence of these feelings, that I venture to hope, that some account of Cumner, where the scene of this fasci-

nating story is principally laid, and the narration of the facts, as given by Ashmole in his *Antiquities of Berkshire*, may not be deemed utterly devoid of interest.

Scenes, characters, and incidents, in themselves trivial, or which had perhaps obtained an ephemeral existence, and then subsided into obscurity or oblivion, derive from the powerful talent of description, possessed by this Author, a splendour which does not intrinsically belong to them, and a sort of classic sanctity,

which attracts us to them with feelings of the liveliest curiosity; of this, Cumner is a strong instance: an obscure village, mentioned only in old topographical works as the scene of the tragic end of the unfortunate wife of Leicester, and now, by the efforts of genius, rendered more remarkable, in the nineteenth century, as having been the scene of that catastrophe, than it was in the sixteenth, when that catastrophe actually occurred. My residence in Oxford has enabled me to visit this interesting spot, and I have myself

experienced an enthusiasm, while standing amid the wreck of those scenes so accurately and beautifully described, which cannot fail of being felt, but which it is impossible for language adequately to define.

I annex the facts of this melancholy story, as related by Ashmole, and which is alluded to in the latter part of “Kenilworth.” The same narration, in the same words, may be found in Anthony Wood’s MSS. in the Ashmolean Collection; so that it is probable that Ashmole

borrowed his account from him. It is curious to observe the difference of the quaint and meagre style of the learned and indefatigable Antiquary, when compared with the highly embellished language, and richly wrought imageries of the Narrator of the same events at the present time.

In allusion to one circumstance, which makes a prominent figure in “Kenilworth,” there is no reason to suppose that an inn, designated “the Black Bear,” flourished in

Cumner in the reign of Queen Elizabeth; but the spirit of romance has penetrated that retired spot; the pride of reputed ancestral renown, and the solicitations of some romantic Members of this University have triumphed, and the sign of “the Black Bear” has been recently affixed to the public-house in the village, with the name of “Giles Gosling” inscribed beneath it.—I have taken every pains that a limited period allowed me, to obtain all the information I could procure for my work; and if my account, concise

as it is, is enabled to interest or satisfy any one's curiosity respecting the now-much-talked-of village of Cumner, I shall feel most deeply gratified.

H. U. TIGHE.

AN
HISTORICAL
ACCOUNT OF CUMNER.

CUMNER, situated in Berkshire, in the Hundred of Hormer, and Deanery of Abingdon, is built on the brow of a hill, commanding a very extensive view over the counties of Oxford and Gloucester. The parish extends about five miles in length, four in breadth, and contains many little tributary hamlets, of three, four, or five houses each.* The number of houses in the village of Cumner and its dependent hamlets, amounts to about a hundred, and the inhabitants of the whole

* *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica*, vol. iv.

parish do not exceed five hundred and fifty.

The Hundred of Horner, or as it is written in old records, Hornemere, was granted to the Abbey of Abingdon, (which afterwards became one of the wealthiest monastic institutions in the kingdom, *) by Edward the Confessor. Previous to this magnificent proof of royal favour and piety, Ceadwalla, king of the West Saxons, gave twenty hides to the Abbey, some parcels of which lay in Cumner. In the year 968, King Edgar bestowed on this foundation thirty tenements, with lands belonging to them. From these, and many other grants from our ancient

* Its revenues in 1117 were valued at nearly two thousand pounds a year.

kings, every part of the Hundred of Hormer was found, at the Reformation, to be in the possession of the Abbey of Abingdon: and Leland tells us, that from Eynsham to Dorchester, the whole country belonged to that monastery.

Of this extensive district, Cumner was honoured with signal marks of the favour and munificence of the members of this powerful body. The ruins of several stone crosses, which may still be seen in different parts of the parish, remain monuments of its monastic possessors, and of their predilection for this salubrious spot. Here the superiors of the society had a cell, or place of retirement, called Cumner Place. Some authorities mention it as “a place of removal” for the monks,

in case of any epidemic or contagious disease infecting the town of Abingdon.* In the year 1538, Thomas Rowland, the last Abbot of Abingdon, on the suppression of monasteries, surrendered all the extensive possessions of this convent into the hands of King Henry VIII. and amongst them the lands of Cumner fell to the crown. In 1546 the king, by letters patent, granted to George Owen, Esq. and John Bridges, Doctor in Physic, “ the lordship, manor, and rectorial tythes “ of Cumner, with all its rights and ap-“ purtenances ; and particularly the capi-“ tal messuage called Cumner Place, and “ the close adjoining, called Cumner “ Park, and the three closes called Saf-

* Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica.—Ashmole's Antiquities of Berkshire, vol. i.

“fron Plottys.” From this period it has passed, by various grants, into the family of the Earl of Abingdon, to whom the parish now belongs.

The ancient mansion-house of Cumner Place adjoined the west end of the church-yard. A heap of stones, and the foundations, now scarcely discernible, are all that remain of that venerable structure, where monks alternately prayed and feasted, and where beauty mourned the alienated affections of a faithless husband, and suffered a violent death ! This dreadful catastrophe, revolting to humanity, is related fully by Ashmole, who has borrowed his account from the original one of Anthony Wood. This narration I have annexed, and though it combines all the

principal incidents of that melancholy tale, I am enabled to illustrate it by some additional remarks from other authorities.

Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, so distinguished among the wise statesmen and handsome courtiers that thronged the court of "England's maiden Queen," giving way for once to the softer sensibilities of his really noble disposition, united himself to Ann, the only daughter and heiress of Sir John Robsert, Knight, of Sisterne, in the county of Norfolk.* This union of affection was, for political reasons, kept secret, and the daughter of an obscure Knight, elevated to share the rank and honours of the first nobleman

* Anthony Wood's MSS.—Dugdale's Baronage, vol. ii. p. 222. In Augustine Vincent's (the Windsor Herald) Catalogue of English Nobles, I find her styled *Amie*.

in England, had little cause to complain of a temporary concealment. But in a mind so warped as Leicester's, his ruling passion soon stifled every other emotion, and the finer feelings of his nature were made subservient to that towering ambition to which he had already so exclusively devoted himself. Imagining that the partiality of the Queen, then in the zenith of power and beauty, might induce her to grant him a participation of her regal dignity, he determined that his innocent wife should not prove a bar to his aggrandizement. Intent on freeing himself from these bonds, he persuaded his confiding and unsuspecting Countess to remove to the house of one Anthony Forster,* a retainer of his own, and at

* Ashmole's *Antiquities of Berkshire*—Dugdale's *Baronage*, vol. 2.

that time his tenant* at Cumner Place. Of the atrocious attempts of Sir Richard Varney, and his accomplices, on the life of this unfortunate lady, and their too

* From the following passage in Wood's Annals, vol. ii. p. 149, it appears, that Anthony Forster was a man of some importance :—

“ Soon after the new Warden comes to Oxford, and the next day being the 30th of March, (1562,) came with Dr. Babington, the Vice-chancellor, Dr. Whyte, Warden of New College, and others, to Merton College gate, where, meeting him, certain of the Fellows gives them letters, under seal, from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Patron of that College, that he should be admitted Warden thereof; but the Fellows not agreeing at that time to give answer to his desire, deferred the matter to the 2nd of April: which day being come, he appears again at nine of the clock in the morning, accompanied with the before-mentioned persons, Henry Noreys of Wytham, Esq. and ANTHONY FORSTER OF CUMNORE, GENT.”

In the same volume, p. 231, Wood, speaking of the Earl of Leicester's character, states, “ that by the potency he had in the kingdom, and so consequently in the University, all persons were at his devotion, and nothing passed therein but he had intelligence by certain favourites that he entertained. Of these, the chief were, Dr. Walt. Baylie, Dr. Martin Culpeper, &c. The first, through his means obtained a fair estate, yet, towards his latter end, when he refused to consent to the making away of his Countess at Mr. Anthony Forster's house, in Comnore, was removed from his favour.”

successful completion, a succinct account is given by Ashmole. This cruel murder was perpetrated on the night of Saturday, the 8th of September, 1560,* and the corpse of their wretched victim was precipitated down a flight of stone stairs, which led from the long gallery to the hall below, under the hope that it might give a plausibility to a tale by which they intended to conceal their crime. She was at first buried privately in Cumner Church, but some inquiry being about to be instituted concerning this mysterious transaction, her body was taken up, and solemnly re-buried in St. Mary's Church, Oxford, according to Anthony Wood, "at the upper end of the chancel," though no stone now remains to

* Anthony Wood's MSS. 1658.

mark the grave of this victim of insatiate ambition.* There is a tradition still extant in the parish of Cumner, that the corpse of the unhappy Countess was found at the bottom of the stairs, with a nail driven into her head.

From this time the vengeance of heaven appears to have fallen, not only on the perpetrators of this atrocious murder, but also on the house in which it was committed. After the death of Forster, Cumner Place was long uninhabited, and stories are still prevalent among the inhabitants of Cumner of the spirit which frequented the deserted mansion :—

* In the annexed account of Cumner, taken from Gough's Camden, it is stated that a monument was erected to her memory in St. Mary's Church.

And in that manor now no more
Is cheerful feast and sprightly ball ;
For ever since that dreary hour
Have spirits haunted Cumnor Hall.

Cumnor Hall.

The apparition was said to appear in the form of a young and beautiful woman, superbly attired, and was mostly seen on the steps, the immediate scene of the barbarous act. The tradition of the place relates, that the ghost was at last removed from the house, and laid to rest in a pond at a short distance from it.

This venerable monastic structure, having been long untenanted, was repaired about a century ago, for the reception of a farmer and his family. Report asserts that a journeyman carpenter, who was at that time employed by his master to take down some of the buildings, discovered a

small trunk filled with gold coins, concealed in a chamber adjoining the long gallery. He left the neighbourhood of Cumner soon afterwards. About eleven years ago, the house again falling into a dilapidated state, it was taken down by the present owner, the Earl of Abingdon, and the site of Cumner Place is all that now remains of the favoured retreat of the powerful ecclesiastics of Abingdon. From inhabitants of the place, who remember the edifice standing, and from several old authorities, I have collected the following description of it :—

This ancient structure, which was of considerable extent, was built round a court or quadrangle of about seventy-two feet in length, and fifty in breadth. The principal entrance was on the north side,

under an archway, with rooms on either side of it ; above these, “ the long gallery” extended the whole length of that side of the building. At the west end of this apartment, the flight of stone stairs, at the bottom of which the body of the unfortunate Lady Leicester was said to have been found, led down to the quadrangle, and great hall of the edifice, which was at right angles to the long gallery. Over a room beyond the hall was the apartment celebrated by the name of “ Lady Dudley’s Chamber ;” and indeed so great an interest had the fate of that hapless Lady excited, that the whole place is still generally called at Cumner, “ Dudley Castle.” On the south side were some apartments which bore traces of superior magnificence, but which were in a state of dil-

pidation, when this seat of the wealthy Abbots became the residence of the industrious farmer.

In the hall of this monkish edifice,* which was converted into a granary, was a large, old stone chimney-piece, on which were carved two mitres, and between them the name of **Abb.** in ancient characters. At one end of it were the arms of the Abbey of Abingdon, and at the other, a shield.†

“About four years ago, (says Dr. Buckler,‡) the arms of the Abbey were

* *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica.*

† Lyson supposes the date of the hall and chapel of Cumner Place, from the style of the windows, to have been as early as the fourteenth century.

‡ Dr. Buckler’s (the Vicar of Cumner,) Replies to Rowe Mores’ Queries to the Clergy of Berks. Aug. 17, 1759.

“ to be seen prettily painted in the re-
“ mains of the glass of one of the win-
“ dows. But some careless hand, or the
“ fingers of some admirer of antiquity,
“ has robbed us of them. Over a door-
“ case in this hall is this date, 1575.
“ Over the great gate at the entrance of
“ the court, in the front of the house, is
“ the following inscription:—

“ JANUA VITÆ VERBUM DOMINI.
“ ANTONIUS FORSTER. 1575.”

The windows of this hall are still extant in the church at Wytham, where they were removed by Lord Abingdon, and the gateways above-mentioned form the entrance into the church-yard at the same place. The boundaries of what was formerly the garden may still be traced.

What is now called “the Park” contains about twenty-five acres, but at the time when Cumner was more highly favoured, it is conjectured, from various circumstances, that it extended to the boundary of the next parish, a distance of nearly three quarters of a mile from the house.

The rustic simplicity of Cumner, so characteristic of an English village, cannot fail of interesting all those whose curiosity may induce them to visit a spot, which alike possesses charms for the antiquary and lover of romance.

ACCOUNT OF CUMNER, FROM GOUGH'S CAMDEN.

“AT Cumner, a small town pleasantly situated on a hill, is a mineral purging water. The west door of the church is in the Saxon style. The Abbot of Abingdon had a manor here; and a mansion-house with the arms of the Abbey on the Hall chimney-piece. When it was occupied by Anthony Forster, who is buried, and has a brass in the church, the wife of the Earl of Leicester was supposed to have been privily made away with in it, being found at the bottom of the stairs,

with her neck broken ; and though the body was taken up by the coroner, no discovery was made at the time, and she was handsomely re-interred in St. Mary's Church, Oxford, *where she has a monument* ; but by the confession of some concerned, it afterwards came out. The chamber called **Dudley's** was shewn in this house in **Ashmole's** time."



DUDLEY EARL OF LEICESTER.

Drawn & Engraved by W Mathews, from a Painting in the Bodleian Gallery.

FROM
ASHMOLE'S
Antiquities of Berkshire,
Octavo, Vol. I. Page 149.

“ ROBERT Dudley Earl of Leicester, a very goodly personage, and singularly well featured, being a great favourite to Queen Elizabeth, it was thought, and commonly reported, that had he been a batchelor, or widower, the Queen would have made him her husband: to this end, to free himself of all obstacles, he commands his wife, or perhaps with fair flattering intreaties, desires her to repose herself here at his servant Anthony Fors-

ter's house, who then lived at the aforesaid manor house, (Cunner Place;) and also prescribed to Sir Richard Varney, (a prompter to this design,) at his coming hither, that he should first attempt to poison her, and if that did not take effect, then by any other way whatsoever to dispatch her. This, it seems, was proved by the report of Dr. Walter Bayly, sometime Fellow of New College, then living in Oxford, and Professor of Physic in that University, who because he would not consent to take away her life by poison, the Earl endeavoured to displace him from the court. This man, it seems, reported for most certain, that there was a practice in Cumnor among the conspirators, to have poisoned this poor innocent lady, a little before she was killed,

which was attempted after this manner. They seeing the good lady sad and heavy, (as one that well knew by her other handling that her death was not far off,) began to persuade her that her present disease was abundance of melancholy, and other humours, &c. And therefore would needs counsel her to take some potion, which she absolutely refusing to do, as still suspecting the worst: whereupon they sent a messenger on a day (unawares to her) for Dr. Bayly, and intreated him to persuade her to take some little potion by his direction, and they would fetch the same at Oxford, meaning to have added something of their own for her comfort, as the Doctor upon just cause, and consideration did suspect, seeing their great importunity, and the

small need the lady had of physic ; and therefore he peremptorily denied their request, misdoubting, (as he afterwards reported,) least if they had poisoned her under the name of his potion, he might have been hanged for a colour of their sin ; and the Doctor remained still well assured, that this way taking no effect, she would not long escape their violence, which afterwards happened thus ; For Sir Richard Varney aforesaid, (the chief projector in this design,) who by the Earl's order remained that day of her death alone with her, with one man only, and Forster, who had that day forcibly sent away all her servants from her to Abingdon market, about three miles distant from this place, they (I say whether first stifling her, or else strangling her

afterwards flung her down a pair of stairs, and broke her neck, using much violence upon her ; but yet, however, though it was vulgarly reported, that she by chance fell down stairs, (but yet without hurting her hood, that was upon her head,) yet the inhabitants will tell you there, that she was conveyed from her usual chamber, where she lay, to another, where the bed's head of the chamber stood close to a privy postern door, where they, in the night came and stifled her in her bed, bruised her head very much, broke her neck, and at length flung her down stairs, thereby believing the world would have thought it a mischance, and so have blinded their villany. But, behold the mercy and justice of God in revenging and discovering this Lady's murder ; for one of the per-

sons that was a coadjutor in this murder, was afterwards taken for a felony in the Marches of Wales, and offering to publish the manner of the aforesaid murder was privately made away with in the prison by the Earl's appointment. And Sir Richard Varney, the other, dying about the same time in London, cried miserably, and blasphemed God, and said to a person of note (who has related the same to others since,) not long before his death, that all the devils in hell did tear him in pieces. Forster likewise after this fact, being a man formerly addicted to hospitality, company, mirth, and music, was afterwards observed to forsake all this, and being affected with much melancholy and pensiveness, (some say with madness,) pined and

drooped away. The wife too of Bald Butler, kinsman to the Earl, gave out the whole fact a little before her death. Neither are the following passages to be forgotten : That as soon as ever she was murdered, they made great haste to bury her before the Coroner had given in his inquest, (which the Earl himself condemned as not done advisedly,) which her father Sir John Robertsett (as I suppose,) hearing of, came with all speed hither, caused her corpse to be taken up, the Coroner to sit upon her, and further enquiry to be made concerning this business to the full ; but it was generally thought, that the Earl stopped his mouth, and made up the business betwixt them, and the good Earl to make plain to the world, the great love he bare to her while

alive, what a grief the loss of so virtuous a lady was to his tender heart, caused (though the thing by these and other means was beaten into the heads of the principal men of the University of Oxford,) her body to be reburied in St. Marie's Church in Oxford, with great pomp and solemnity. It is remarkable, when Dr. Babington (the Earl's chaplain) did preach the funeral sermon, he tript once or twice in his speech, by recommending to their memories, that virtuous lady so *pitifully murdered*, instead of saying so *pitifully slain*.

This Earl, after all his murders and poisonings, was himself poisoned by that which was prepared for others, (some say by his wife,) at Cornbury Lodge, (though

Baker in his Chronicle would have had it at Killingworth.) Anno. 1588."

Extract from a small Volume in the Bodleian Library, printed in 1584, entitled, "The Copie of a Leter, wrytten by a Master of Arte of Cambrige, to his Friende in London, about some Proceedinges of the Erle of Leycester and his Friendes in England."

P. 27. "Onlie for the present I must advertise you that you may not take holde so exactlie of al my L. doinges in women's affaires, neither touching their Marriages, neither yet their husbandes.

" For first his Lordship hath a speciall fortune, that when he desireth anie woman's favor, then what person soever standeth in his way, hath the luck to die quicklie for the finishing of his desire. As

for example: when his Lordship was in full hope to marrie her Ma: and his own Wyfe stood in his light, as he supposed; he did but send her asid, to the house of his Servaunt Forster of Cumner by Oxforde, where shortlie after she had the chaunce to fal from a paire of stares, and so to breake her neck, but yet without hurting of her hoode, that stooode upon her heade. But Sir Richard Varney who by commaundment remayned with her that daye alone, wyth one man onlie, and had sent away perforce al her servautes from her to a market two miles of, he (I say) with his Ma. can tel how she died, wh. Man being taken afterward for a felonie in the Marches of Wales and offering to publish the maner of the said murder, was made awaye privilie in the Prison. And

Sir Richard himself dying about the same time in London, cried piteouslie and blasphemed God and said to a Gentleman of worship of myne acquaintance, not long before his death, that al the Divels in hell did tear him in peeces. The wyfe also of Balde Butler, Kinsman to my L. gave out the whole fact a little before her death. But to return unto my purpose, this was my Lordes good fortune to have his wyfe die at that tyme when it was like to turne moste to his profit."

ACCOUNT OF THE MARRIAGE
OF
THE EARL OF LEICESTER,
TO
AMIE ROBSART,
WITH SOME NOTICES OF HER FAMILY, &c.

THE following highly satisfactory and interesting account of the early life of the Earl of Leicester, is extracted from the “*Biographia Britannica*.” It is the more curious, as it refutes, on the authority of some of our principal historians, the account of the clandestine union of that nobleman with the unfortunate daughter of Sir John Robsart, but which gives such additional interest to the history of her wedded life, as related by the Author of the Romance of “*Kenilworth*.” From

this account too, it is evident that she was descended from illustrious ancestors, the representative of a noble family, and the heiress of extensive property.

“ Robert Dudley, Baron of Denbigh, and Earl of Leicester, was son of John Duke of Northumberland, and brother to Ambrose Earl of Warwick. We have no certainty at all as to the time of his birth, or distinct account of the manner of his education, except that he had a competent knowledge of the Latin tongue, and was thoroughly versed in the Italian. He received the honour of knighthood when he was but a youth, and came very early into the service and favour of King Edward. It was one of his Father’s maxims to marry his children while they

were young, as the surest means of fixing their fortunes, bringing them into a settled course of life, and giving him an opportunity of procuring for them valuable grants, or places of honour and profit. Accordingly June 4th, 1550, being the day after the marriage of his brother Lord Lisle, to the Duke of Somerset's daughter, Sir Robert Dudley espoused Amie, daughter of Sir John Robsart, at Sheen, in Surrey, the King honouring their nuptials with his presence. King Edward enters this marriage in his journal in the following words : ‘ June 4. 1550. Sir Robert Dudley third son to the Earl of Warwick, married Sir John Robsart’s daughter, after which marriage there were certain gentlemen that did strive who should take away a goose’s head, which was

‘ hanged alive on two cross posts.’* Authors differ as to the name of this lady. Brooke, in his first edition, † calls her Amie, in which he agrees with some ancient authorities; but in his second edition, following the general course of other authors, he stiles her Anne, ‡ and indeed in old writings it is very difficult to distinguish between Amie, and Anne. She was a very considerable heiress, and descended of a noble family in Norfolk, one of her ancestors by the father’s side, having been a peer of the realm in the reign of Henry V. and two of them, Knights of the Garter in the reign of that prince, and of his son.

* Burnet’s History of the Reformation, vol. ii. in the Appendix, p. 15.

† Cat. of Nobility, p. 136.

‡ Vincent’s Errors in Brooke’s Cat. p. 310.

So that this match, at the time it was made, agreed perfectly with his father's maxim, and afforded Sir Robert Dudley a very good establishment for a younger brother, which he improved by procuring grants to his father-in-law and himself. The death of this lady happened September 8th, 1560, at a very unlucky juncture for the Earl's reputation, because the world at that time conceived it might be much for his conveniency to be without a wife, this island then holding two Queens, young and without husbands. The manner too of this poor lady's death, which Mr. Camden says, was by a fall from a high place, * was another untoward circumstance, which added to the number of

* Speaking of Leicester, he says, "Cujus uxor Robserti hæres, præcipitio perierat." Eliz. Annal. p. 84.

this favourite's enemies, filled the world with the rumour of a lamentable tragedy. The reader will perhaps expect to be gratified with some account of this, and it so falls out, that the industrious John Aubrey, Esq. speaking of Cumnor, in Berkshire, where this happened, inserts the following relation, which is very circumstantial, and carries in it strong pretences to absolute certainty." (The succinct account of this catastrophe from Ashmole's *Antiquities of Berkshire* is here introduced.*) " There are some things in this account not very consistent, which in so dark an affair is not at all strange, but with respect to the least intelligible passage of all, which is her father's being

* Inserted in page 29 of this Work.

so silent about a matter, which opened the mouths of all the world besides ; a very probable account may be given, which is this, the inquisition taken after the death of this lady, was to determine who were her heirs, for her father was long before dead, and this was the reason that the inquisition produced no other effect, than preserving the family estate, which was very considerable to John Walpole, Esq. ancestor to the present Earl of Orford.

“ It may not be amiss to observe, that the **Lord Robert Robsart** came over from the low countries with King Edward III. and that he left behind him three sons, John, Lewis, and Theodorick : or as we

wrote it in those days, Tyrrey. Lewis, the second brother, became Lord Bourchier by his marriage, and was a Knight of the Order of the Garter, but dying in the lifetime of his elder brother, he became his heir. This Sir John Robsart was also a Knight of the Garter, and dying in 1450, left his estate to Sir John Robsart his son, who had issue Sir Theodorick, or Sir Tyrrey Robsart, who married the daughter and heiress of Sir Thomas Syderston, in the county of Norfolk, by whom he had issue, Sir John Robsart, and a daughter Lucy, who married Edward Walpole, Esq. of Houghton. Sir John left behind him, an only daughter Amie, who was the wife of Lord Robert Dudley, and by the inquisition before mentioned,

John Walpole, Esq. in right of his mother Lucy Robsart, aunt to this unfortunate Lady, was found to be her next heir, and came into possession of her lands.”



QUEEN ELIZABETH.

From an Ancient Statue in the Parish of C...

STATUE OF QUEEN ELIZABETH, NEAR CUMNER.

SINCE the publication of the first edition of this small work, I have seen an ancient statue of Queen Elizabeth, which stands in the parish of Cumner, in the garden of a farm-house, near Ferry Hinksey, at present in the occupation of Mr. Salisbury Richards. This statue is about five feet four inches in height: it is of stone, well executed, and the ornaments of the dress carved with the greatest accuracy. There is no doubt that it is an original statue of that

popular sovereign, who is represented in the attitude in which she was so often delineated by her admirers, with a globe in her left hand: the right hand is broken off, but it probably held a sceptre. It was transferred to its present situation upwards of thirty years ago, from the Manor House, called Dean Court, though its proper name is Denton Court. Some persons now living remember it standing in that house about forty years since, and it is not improbable that at a period more remote, it ornamented Cumner Place, as Denton Court is in the parish of Cumner, and is also the property of the Earl of Abingdon.

Denton Court was first abbreviated to Dencourt, and afterwards changed to

Dean Court, or Dane Court. Some writers* have asserted that the latter is the proper name, it being derived from the Danes having besieged Wytham Castle from that place.† This is refuted by that correct and diligent antiquary Hearne, in his Glossary to Peter Langtoft, page 594. He there says, that “ Denton Court, in the “ parish of Cumnor, near Abbington in “ Berks, was not so denominated from the “ Danes, as several have suggested, but “ from its being situated in a valley. In old “ time there were at that place several little

* This is A. Wood’s opinion. See Lib. Nigr. vol. ii.

† Some are of opinion that the Danes having taken this village of Seckworth, from thence besieged Wigtham Castle on the hill. Nor do I see any improbability in it. But whereas they add, that Denton Court, not far from Seckworth, was called so from the Danes, it is plainly a mistake, as may be seen from what I have observed in my Glossary to Peter Langtoft, p. 594; to which I refer the reader.—*Hearne upon Chilswell Farm.*

“ cottages, all which together were styled
“ *Denton*, i. e. *a town in the valley*; but
“ a Manour House, called frequently in
“ those days *Curtis* or *Court*, being at
“ length built there, it was afterwards,
“ as ’tis to this time, called *Denton Court*,
“ of which kind of courts there was a
“ vast number formerly.”

When Cumner Place was pulled down, some of the materials were appropriated to building the new cottage of Dean Court, which is situated about a mile from Botley on the Cheltenham Road. The present inhabitant, Mr. Slatter, is of opinion, that it must formerly have been a large house, as pavement to a considerable extent has been discovered at different times.

I have annexed an accurate engraving of the statue, as illustrative of the antiquities of the parish of Cumner, and likely to prove interesting to the lover of that species of research.

CUMNER CHURCH.

THE Church of Cumner is a strong-built edifice, apparently of great antiquity. The precise date has not been ascertained, but the west door is finished in the Saxon style. On the north side of the chancel is the tomb of Anthony Forster ; a monument of grey marble, surmounted by a canopy of the same, supported by two pillars. On the back of the tomb, on brass plates, are engraved a man in armour, and his wife, in the habit of her times, both kneeling before a faldstool, together with the figures of three children kneeling behind their mother. A long epitaph assigns to him a large share of



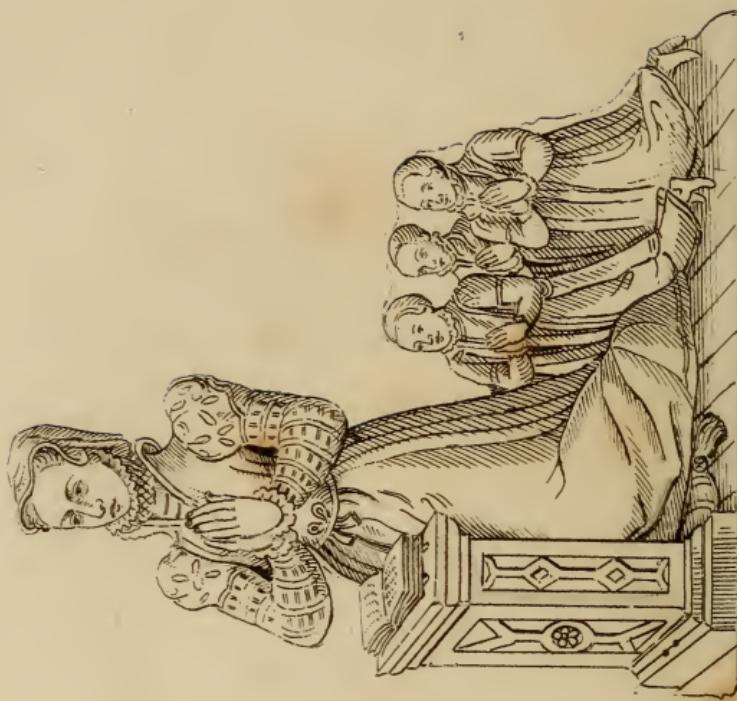
Drawn by N. Whitlock

Engraved by J. Fisher, Cumnor.

THE TOMB OF ANTHONY FORSTER.

in Cumnor Church, Berks.

Anne his wife.



Anthony Forster.



the virtues which most adorn the human character ; and from the historical narrative of his participation in the murder of the Countess of Leicester at his own house, proves how little reliance is to be placed on monumental panegyrics.

The inscription under his figure is as follows :—

Antonius Forster, generis generosa propago,
Cumnerae Dominus Barcheriensis erat :
Armiger armigero prognatus patre Richardo,
Qui quondam Iphlethae Salopiensis erat.
Quatuor ex isto flurerunt stemmate nati,
Ex isto Antonius stemmate quartus erat.
Mente sagax, animo praecellens, corpore promptus,
Eloquio dulcis, ore disertus erat.
In factis probitas fuit, in sermone venustas,
In vultu gravitas, religione fides.
In patriam pietas, in egenos grata voluntas,
Accedunt reliquis annumeranda bonis.

*Sic quod cuncta rapit, rapuit non omnia lethum,
Sed quae mors rapuit, vivida fama dedit.*

Underneath the figure of the lady are these lines :—

Anna Rainoldo Williams fuit orta parente,
Evasit meritis armiger ille suis,
Sed minor huic frater praestante laude Baronis
Chamensis viguit gloria magna soli.
Armiger ergo pater, dominus sed avunculus Annae;
Clara erat heis meritis clarior Anna suis.
Casta viro, studiosa Dei, dilecta propinquis,
Stirpe beata satis, prole beata satis
Mater Joannis, mediaque aetate Roberti
Et demum Henrici nobilis illa parens.
Cynthia, Penelope tumulo clauduntur in isto,
Anna sed hoc tumulo sola sepulta jacet.

The six following lines are written beneath the foregoing, two by two, in praise of Anthony Forster :—

Argutae resonas citharae praetendere chordas
 Nobit, et Aonia concrepuisse lyra.
 Gaudebat terrae teneras defigere plantas,
 Et mira pulchras construere arte domos.
 Composita varias lingua formare loquelas
 Doctus, et edocta scribere multa manu.

The arms are these :—

Quarterly. { 3. Hunter's horns, stringed.
 { 3. Pheons, with their points upwards.

The arms over her head are as follows :

Quarterly. { 1. Two organ pipes, in saltier, be-
 tween four crosses paté.
 { 2. A raven.
 { 3. A chevron ermine, between three
 lions' heads, erased within a
 border of roundelle, and on a
 chief bar a pale charged with
 a pelican.
 { 4. As the first.*
 { 5. As the first.

* Anthony Wood's MSS.

At the foot of Anthony Forster's tomb lie the bodies of two of the daughters of Rainold Williams, probably the same family as the wife of Forster. The following is one of the inscriptions :—

Wedythe Stavertoon dafter to Raygnold Wylliams
of Borfeld in the County of Bark^s esquier.

The other is imperfect, and almost illegible ; and is to the memory of Katharine, the wife of Henry Staverton, and also daughter of Rainold Williams, of Borfeld.

In the south transept of the Church are two ancient tombs, supposed to be those of two Abbots of Abingdon.*

* Lyson's Berkshire.

“ There is a tradition that Cassenton (on the other side of the Thames, in Oxfordshire,) was in old times a chapel of ease to Cumner, and a part of the parish. It is said, that within these hundred years the people of Cassenton used to claim a right of burying there ; that they crossed the river with their dead at Somerford Mead, (where, it is said, the plank-stones are still to be seen by which they passed,) and from thence came up through the riding in Cumner Wood, (which they claimed as their church-way) and at a lane near a house called Blind Pinnock’s, began their psalm singing, which lane is from hence called to this day, Songer’s Lane. It is certain, that there is a part of Cumner church-yard, lying behind the Church, known by the name of Cassenton

Burying Place, and that a demand of an acknowledgement of sixpence per annum is frequently made, and always complied with, by the parish of Cumner.”*

It may not be uninteresting to notice some singular old customs prevalent at Cumner, as related by Dr. Buckler, but which, I understand, have been discontinued within the last few years.

On “the Perambulation Circuit” of the parish in the Rogation Days, the vicar and parishioners used to go into the ferry on the boundary of the parish, and crossing over to the Oxfordshire side,

* Dr. Buckler’s Replies to Rowe Mores’ Queries.—Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica. 1759.

they laid hold on the twigs, or reeds on the bank, and concluded the ceremony by the Gospel of the Ascension. By this act, they were understood to assert the whole breadth of the river to belong to the parish and manor of Cumner. The sum of 6s. 8d. the amount of Swinford tything was always brought to the vicar at Eynsham Ferry in a basin of water by the ferryman, (who attended him with a clean napkin,) and after he had fished for his money, he was expected to distribute the water among the young people who came within his reach, as a token of remembrance to them of the custom.

It was, a few years ago, a custom in the parish of Cumner for the parishioners, all those who payed the vicar any tythes, im-

mediately after prayers on the afternoon of Christmas Day to repair to the vicarage, where they were entertained with bread, cheese, and ale. They claimed on this occasion four bushels of malt brewed into ale and small beer, two bushels of wheat made into bread, and half a hundred weight of cheese ; the remains of the ale, small beer, bread and cheese were divided the next day after morning prayer to the poor of the parish.* This hospitable and charitable custom has now fallen into disuse, and I understand, that a donation to the poor has been substituted in lieu of it.

* Bibl. Topog. Brit.—Lyson's Berkshire.

Cumner Hall.

THE dews of summer night did fall,
The moon (sweet regent of the sky)
Silver'd the walls of Cumner Hall,
And many an oak that grew thereby.

Now nought was heard beneath the skies,
(The sounds of busy life were still,)
Save an unhappy lady's sighs,
That issued from that lonely pile.

“ Leicester,” she cried, “ is this thy love,
“ That thou so oft has sworn to me,
“ To leave me in this lonely grove,
“ Immur'd in shameful privity

“ No more thou comest with lover’s speed,
“ Thy once beloved bride to see ;
“ But be she alive, or be she dead,
“ I fear, stern Earl, ’s the same to thee.

“ Not so the usage I receiv’d,
“ When happy in my father’s hall ;
“ No faithless husband then me griev’d,
“ No chilling fears did me appal.

“ I rose up with the cheerful morn,
No lark more blithe, no flow’r more gay;
“ And, like the bird that haunts the thorn,
“ So merrily sung the live-long day.

“ If that my beauty is but small,
“ Among court ladies all despis’d ;
“ Why didst thou rend it from that hall,
Where, scornful Earl, it well was priz’d ?

“ And when you first to me made suit,
“ How fair I was you oft would say !
“ And, proud of conquest, pluck’d the fruit,
“ Then left the blossom to decay.

“ Yes, now neglected and despis’d,
“ The rose is pale—the lily’s dead—
“ But he that once their charms so priz’d,
“ Is sure the cause those charms are fled.

“ For know, when sick’ning grief doth prey,
“ And tender love’s repaid with scorn,
“ The sweetest beauty will decay—
“ What flow’reth can endure the storm ?

“ A court I’m told is beauty’s throne,
“ Where every lady’s passing rare ;
“ That eastern flowers, that shame the sun,
“ Are not so glowing, not so fair.

“ Then, Earl, why didst thou leave the beds

“ Where roses and where lilies vie,

“ To seek a primrose, whose pale shades

“ Must sicken—when those gaudes are by ?

“ 'Mong rural beauties I was one,

“ Among the fields wild flow'rs are fair ;

“ Some country swain might me have won,

“ And thought my beauty passing rare.

“ But, Leicester, (or I much am wrong)

“ Or 'tis not beauty lures thy vows ;

“ Rather ambition's gilded crown

“ Makes thee forget thy humble spouse.

“ Then, Leicester, why, again I plead,

“ (The injur'd surely may repine,)

“ Why didst thou wed a country maid,

“ When some fair princess might be thine ?

“ Why didst thou praise my humble charms,
“ And oh ! then leave them to decay ?
“ Why didst thou win me to thy arms,
“ Then leave me to mourn the live-long day ?

“ The village maidens of the plain
“ Salute me lowly as they go ;
“ Envious they mark my silken train,
“ Nor think a Countess can have woe.

“ The simple nymphs ! they little know
“ How far more happy's their estate—
“ —To smile for joy—than sigh for woe—
“ —To be content—than to be great.

“ How far less blest am I than them ?
“ Daily to pine and waste with care !
“ Like the poor plant, that from its stem
“ Divided—feels the chilling air.

“ Nor (cruel Earl !) can I enjoy
“ The humble charms of solitude ;
“ Your minions proud my peace destroy,
“ By sullen frowns or pratings rude.

“ Last night as sad I chanc’d to stray,
“ The village death-bell smote my ear ;
“ They wink’d aside, and seem’d to say,
“ Countess, prepare—thy end is near.

“ And now, while happy peasants sleep,
“ Here I sit lonely and forlorn ;
“ No one to sooth me as I weep,
“ Save Philomel on yonder thorn.

“ My spirits flag—my hopes decay—
“ Still that dread death-bell smites my ear ;
“ And many a boding seems to say,
“ Countess, prepare—thy end is near.”

Thus sore and sad that lady griev'd,
In Cumner Hall so lone and drear ;
And many a heartfelt sigh she heav'd,
And let fall many a bitter tear.

And ere the dawn of day appear'd,
In Cumner Hall so lone and drear,
Full many a piercing scream was heard,
And many a cry of mortal fear.

The death-bell thrice was heard to ring,
An aërial voice was heard to call ;
And thrice the raven flapp'd its wing
Around the tow'rs of Cumner Hall.

The mastiff howl'd at village door,
The oaks were shattered on the green ;
Woe was the hour—for never more
That hapless Countess e'er was seen.

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And in that manor now no more
Is cheerful feast and sprightly ball ;
For ever since that dreary hour
Have spirits haunted Cumner Hall.

The village maids, with fearful glance,
Avoid the ancient moss-grown wall ;
Nor ever lead the merry dance
Among the groves of Cumner Hall.

Full many a traveller oft hath sigh'd,
And pensive wept the Countess' fall,
As wand'ring onwards they've espied
The haunted tow'rs of Cumner Hall.

THE END.

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